



GAE Committee Public Hearing March 18, 2016

TESTIMONY OF SECRETARY OF THE STATE DENISE W. MERRILL REGARDING:

- **House Bill 5616, AN ACT CONCERNING NOTICES AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

The bill proposes meeting notices be received and shared electronically. It is a common-sense proposal that will help us get announcements to the public faster, more efficiently and enable customers of state services access this information more easily.

We request that you support this initiative.

Currently, public meeting notices are listed on the Secretary of the State's website. However, the process is a surprisingly outdated and labor-intensive task. Requests are received through a variety of means including email, fax and postal mail. Those announcements are then individually scanned and posted to the website. At busy times it can create backlogs and bottlenecks.

An online portal that enables agencies to directly input meeting notices on their own is already in production. Notices will be instantly viewable by the public. The notices will be searchable and sortable by agency or date. A digital map (like a Google map) will be conveniently provided, and a QR code is offered so customers can download the event directly into a mobile calendar.

Delaware uses a similar system that is a good, illustrative case study for the Committee.

The new system comes at no cost to the state as this project is being pursued through a vendor that is already on contract.

The Secretary of the State's office is committed to the dissemination of meeting notices. My staff will manage the vendor and approve passwords. However, this will be a much more convenient method for state agencies to share information with the public.

All that is needed now is a clarification of the change in procedure for the agencies in statute. We hope you will approve this proposal.

There are a few additional issues in the bill that need to be addressed.

As written, the bill includes multi-district municipal agencies as being required to post to our website. The Secretary of the State's office currently does not require that information as it is highly localized. The Secretary of the State's office has less contact with these local agencies and managing passwords as well as appropriate notices would add considerable difficulty. We would like that portion of the legislation to reflect only state and quasi-state agencies.

There is also a portion of this bill, beginning at line 139, which would allow for notice of special and reconvened sessions to be sent electronically. I support it. However, this was addressed by Raised Bill 5245, AN ACT PERMITTING ELECTRONIC NOTIFICATION OF SPECIAL SESSIONS, which has already received a joint favorable report from this Committee. I would suggest we consider how we can merge any language from this bill with 5245.

In addition, as I noted last week, portions of this bill concerning the protection of voters' birth date information and the publication of the voter file on the internet may be duplicative of House Bill 5613. I have previously conveyed constituent concerns regarding privacy violation in my testimony on HB 5613.